

## Heartland Blacksmiths: Conversations at the Forge

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the radical difference between the material world of many American pasts and the age of the boom box, the home video, and the microwave oven.

I wish that *History Museums in the United States* gave more attention to the visitors, the audience that uses these museums. While museum visitors certainly come for recreation or for diversion, they come primarily because museums, better than any other medium, open up a complex world that they seek to understand and to which they wish to introduce young people. On one level, the world revealed in the history museum is a world of cultural inheritance, but on another level it is a world of the universal human condition, of limitations and wide-open possibilities. It is in enabling visitors to reach into the world of the human condition that museums can best take advantage of the methods and conclusions of today's historians. Museums can and do look just beyond the cutoff jeans, mirror sunglasses, and bored facial masks of their visitors to reach people who are there because they are very much interested in learning how real people of the past—those same people revealed in the new social history—struggled, failed, prevailed, and survived. After all, it is not in the cruelty, crassness, and injustice of the past that history's lessons lie, but rather in the wonder of the human body and spirit—individual and collective—that brings hope, purpose, art, and love generation after generation despite all that happens. Making contact with that wondering audience is the role and challenge of the history museums of the 1990s.

Leon and Rosenzweig have assembled a thought-provoking collection. They have given museums and historians a place to start their thinking about the future.

*Heartland Blacksmiths: Conversations at the Forge*, by Richard Reichelt, photographs by Richard Wilbers and Richard Reichelt. Shawnee Books. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988. x, 177 pp. Illustrations. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY WAYNE FRANKLIN, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

"No ideas but in things," claimed the twentieth-century American physician-poet William Carlos Williams. What Williams meant—that our intellectual life should arise from the practice of living—would be well appreciated by the nine midwestern blacksmiths interviewed by Richard Reichelt between 1984 and 1987. The smiths in question came to their craft by various routes, but all of them seem to persist in

it because what they do with their hands feeds their minds. The things they make are fertile of ideas.

Rarely does the modern worker have the chance to make finished objects from so elemental a substance as iron or steel. The opposite is true with Reichelt's smiths. Whether they make and mount horse-shoes, fix edge tools, or sharpen plows—or make wood stoves, household implements, and sculptural shapes—these eight men and one woman have mastered the magic that made the Romans honor the smith in the figure of the forge-god Vulcan. Together, these midwestern iron-workers represent the survival (or revival) of artisanal skill—and artisanal satisfaction—in today's plastic world. Like the material with which they work, their lives as revealed in Reichelt's book seem marked by strength and integrity. All of them seem to be happier because they are doing what they love to do. That may just be the mark of a life wisely spent.

Reichelt's book gives a good deal of insight into how and why these individuals became smiths. Skilled in the craft himself, he asks intelligent questions of his subjects. The result is an especially pleasing book, modest but as elemental as iron in its own way. Reichelt is to be commended for having seen how satisfying such a series of vignettes of the modern craftsperson might prove, and for shaping that vision into such a well-made reality.

*A Record in Detail: Architectural Photographs of Jack E. Boucher*, by Jack E. Boucher. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988. 107 pp. \$34.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY GERALD MANSHEIM, WEST BRANCH

This slim but elegant volume is a record in detail—not only the details inherent in Jack Boucher's large-format photography, but also the details of his workaday life as a photographer. Boucher is the full-time photographer for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), a position he has held for more than a quarter of a century. He has made more than half of the large-format photographs—some six thousand at the time of this publication—that HABS, through the Library of Congress, makes available to scholars and the general public copyright free. If his name is not familiar, his photographs should be, since they have appeared in numerous exhibitions and publications.

The seventy-four photographs presented here with commentary are an accompaniment to a selection of 145 photographs made into a traveling exhibition mounted by HABS and the Library of

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